

TITLE: The E Street Complex

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~~Confidential~~*On buildings and grounds*

## The E Street Complex

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*This article is based mainly on an address of 21 June 1990 at a Directorate of Science and Technology staff meeting.*

**M**y purpose is to describe briefly the origins of the CIA in terms of the property it has occupied, particularly the E Street complex, and some of the people who occupied it.

There is somewhat more attention paid to the beginnings of scientific and technical intelligence than to other parts of our profession because, in my view, S&T enjoys pride of place at E Street.

The plot of land on which the E Street complex is located was originally a steep bluff on the Potomac River, deeded in 1664 by English royal authority to John Longworth. Over the next century, some 19 acres of this property passed into the hands of two families. Sam Davidson owned the smaller portion to the north, and David Burnes owned everything to the south, plus considerably more adjacent land extending across what is now Constitution Avenue but was then known as Goose Creek or Tyber Creek. In 1790, the Federal Government acquired the 19 acres plus adjacent land, which became known as Federal Appropriation 4 or Federal Reservation 4.

### Disputed Territory

It is a matter of some dispute as to just how the federal government acquired this land—whether by purchase, seizure (as in “appropriation”) or donation. To check on this, I visited the Columbia Historical Society in 1986 and through their files established that the dividing line between the Davidson and Burnes portions of the 19-acre plot runs roughly parallel to and just north of what is

now South Building and south of what is now East Building. Officials of the Society informed me that in recent years some of Burnes’ descendants have brought suit to recover their property or at least to receive financial compensation. That means that the title to South Building is theoretically in dispute.

The chances that land owned for 200 years by the federal government would revert to private ownership seem remote (Federal Reservations 1, 2, and 3 are now occupied by the White House, the Capitol, and the Mall). Still, the possible legal complications became a significant factor in the decision made by the Agency’s Office of Technical Services to relocate from South Building to the New Headquarters Building.

### A National Observatory

For more than a half century nothing much was done with Federal Reservation 4. The 19-acre parcel was considered and rejected as the site for a fortification, for a national university, and even for the Capitol building. In 1842, a Congressional bill authorized the construction of a national observatory, under control of the Navy. In that sense at least, it can be said that the first activities authorized for the E Street property were scientific and technical and related to national defense.

From 1844 until about 1894, the Washington Observatory witnessed numerous scientific achievements. Matthew Maury, for example, studied the influence of tides and winds on sea navigation before going off to join the Confederate side in the Civil War. A dome was constructed, on which a black ball was suspended from a pole. “At

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precisely noon every day, celestial time, it slid down the pole," a reporter of the time observed. "Fascinated Washingtonians set their watches and marveled at the wonders of science."<sup>1</sup>

By 1894, the observatory had been abandoned by the scientists largely because the Tyber Creek had become a stinking marsh. The Navy kept control of the property, however, and after the Tyber Creek was paved into Constitution Avenue, the Navy constructed additional buildings over the next half century. The buildings we are most concerned about include North, Central, East, and South.

### North and Central Buildings

North Building, built in 1903, lay parallel to Central Building. It was used by the Public Health Service for research on smallpox, typhus, rabies and diphtheria; for improving vaccines; for setting standards for antitoxin manufacture; and for serving as an educational facility for the service's health offices. When William J. Donovan took over the E Street facility during World War II, North Building housed such diverse units as Procurement, Medical Services, Schools and Training, and Motor Transport. When I arrived in CIA in November 1960 and was assigned to North Building, I found it housed mostly the Directorate of Intelligence's (DI) Office of Central Reference, but it also included Mac's Snack Bar, where the main entrees nearly every day seemed to be American cheese on white and peanut butter and jelly on raisin bread. North Building was demolished for highway expansion in the early 1960s, thereby reducing the 19-acre parcel to 15 acres.

Central Building was completed in 1904, and it served largely as a Marine hospital until World War II. During General Donovan's tenure, Central Building housed the Deputy Director for Intelligence, General John Magruder. Magruder's component performed many of the functions of the

current DI plus counterintelligence, clandestine collection, and various types of domestic contacts. Most of these offices were located outside Central Building.

Central Building also contained the Planning Group. This group had general responsibility for seeing that OSS operations were coordinated with military operations, and particular duties in improving psychological warfare. In addition, it was responsible for the Special Relations Office, which handled the many problems in coordinating OSS activities with the State Department, other branches of the US Government, and foreign diplomatic missions in the US.

In a sense, the presence today of portions of the Intelligence Community Staff in Central Building continues the interagency direction exercised from the same building in World War II.

### The "Kremlin"

The cornerstone of what is now East Building was laid in 1932, and the building served as the administrative headquarters of the medical and public health facilities at E Street until World War II. Then Donovan established his office in Room 122 in the southwest corner of the first floor. The building was formally known as the Administration Building, but in the OSS days it was commonly known as the "Kremlin." (The informal OSS name for the headquarters complex was "St. Elizabeths.") When CIA was set up in 1947, Admiral Hillenkoetter, the first Director of CIA, occupied Donovan's old office. So did the next Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), General Walter Bedell Smith, of whom more than one colleague remarked, with more admiration than criticism, that he was the most even-tempered man they had ever met—he was "always angry."

Allen Dulles began his almost nine-year tenure as DCI in the same office but soon moved over to what is now South Building. Thus, in the mid- and later 1950s, while construction was under way at Langley, South Building temporarily became the Administration Building and the former

<sup>1</sup> *Mr. Lincoln's City*. By Richard M. Lee. Epm Publications; McLean, Virginia; 1981.

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Admin Building was renamed, permanently, East Building.

### South Building

South Building is the largest in the E Street complex. It was constructed at about the same time as East Building or somewhat earlier—the GSA records are murky. South, like Central, was a hospital before World War II. Under Donovan, several components operated from South: Communications, Special Funds, the Naval Command, Security, and the most interesting of all, the Research and Development Branch, presided over by Doctor Stanley Lovell, who occupied Room 113 and answered Donovan's many phone calls on extension 2104. The R&D Branch was the daddy of the old Technical Services Division in the Directorate of Plans and therefore the granddaddy of the Office of Technical Services in the Directorate of Science and Technology. But it is worth emphasizing that in the OSS days "branches" contained "divisions" rather than the reverse and both were larger than "offices," except for the designation of the organization itself, OSS. Moreover, the official *OSS War Report* indicates that R&D Branch had responsibilities in addition to technical services. Lovell reported directly to Donovan and the First Assistant Director, Colonel Ned Buxton, and he also represented OSS on all matters scientific and technical to other parts the US Government and foreign governments; this suggests that he was in fact though not in name the first Deputy Director for Science and Technology.

Lovell was the chief scientific and technical expert under Donovan, but another of that ilk was the Chief of the Field Photographic Branch, headquartered in the South Agricultural Building. The National Photographic Interpretation Center is the direct descendant of this component. Its chief was the famous Hollywood film director John Ford, who much preferred taking live-action footage of battle scenes at Midway and D-Day to attending staff meetings more than a mile away.

Ford was not the only OSS official in the Washington area who had to travel to attend staff meetings. A short walking distance to the southeast of the E

Street complex were two large "temporary" wooden structures, M and Que Buildings, where Edward Bigelow, Deputy Director for Strategic Services Operations, and many of his colleagues in paramilitary action held sway. James Murphy, chief of counterintelligence, was also located there, and CIA's DI inherited those two buildings.

### More Real Estate

Other significant OSS facilities in the Washington area, which were identified through the listing of guard posts in the February 1944 OSS telephone directory, included:

- Annex #1, 401 23rd Street, N.W., where William Langer ran the Research and Analysis Branch.
- The Auditorium, 1901 New York Avenue (19th and E Streets, N.W.), where H. C. Barton was Chief of Presentation.
- The Coliseum, 510 26th Street, N.W., where the Second Assistant Director of OSS, Charles Cheston, was located, as were components dealing with budget, finance, and civilian personnel. In CIA days, the building was referred to as Riverside Stadium, or just the Stadium, and it housed similar support functions. (In the spring some of us at the E Street complex were told to be ready to lay sandbags at the Stadium if the Potomac flooded.) As is the case with North, M, and Que Buildings, it no longer exists.
- The Courts Building, 310 6th Street, N.W., where DeWitt Poole presided over the DI's Foreign Nationalities Branch.
- Auth's Warehouse at 6th and D Streets, S.W., used for just that purpose.
- Office space for miscellaneous purposes in the War and Interior Departments.

This list does not include the more than 20 OSS training and special purpose areas outside Washington listed in the *OSS War Report*. OSS had a

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**Original OSS/CIA Building and Grounds**

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<sup>a</sup> Used by both OSS and CIA; others only by CIA.

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“farm” too, RTU-II, located in Maryland. One of the OSS training areas is better known these days as Camp David. All of these US facilities were

used to support a fairly large enterprise; by my count of the official personnel roster, more than 21,000 worked for Donovan at some point during

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World War II. A precise listing of CIA buildings in the Washington area and their functions would be beyond the classification level of this article.

### Fond Memories

The late Archie Roosevelt fondly recalled<sup>2</sup> what life was like in the Clandestine Service in the temporary buildings, I, J, K, and L, which were on the south side of the reflecting pool below the Lincoln Memorial. As Archie remembered it, working conditions were austere but the view was pleasant; the conditions ensured that virtuous conduct usually prevailed one way or another. And the move to more comfortable surroundings was not an unmixed blessing. I will give Archie the final words:

"They were dilapidated, impractical, hard to heat or cool, yet we developed a certain affection for them. We were all within reach of each other in well-defined territories along the corridor connecting all the buildings. We walked together at noon by the pool in warm weather, and those sufficiently high in the hierarchy to enjoy offices with windows facing the pool and the Lincoln Memorial could gaze out at the skaters in winter. Others in the back wings could at least contemplate their colleagues at work in the buildings next door, giving us a comfortable sense of camaraderie and intimacy.

<sup>2</sup> *For Lust of Knowing*. Archibald Roosevelt. Little Brown; Boston, Mass.; 1988.

Sometimes this propinquity led to security problems, and windows had to be screened off to prevent other elements of the Agency from seeing papers or maps they had no need to know about. At least in one case I know of, it led also to personal embarrassment. One of my friends, working in his second-floor office on a weekend, happened to look down and see a colleague in an office below in the process of undressing a pretty secretary, with the obvious intention of committing a bit of unauthorized covert action.

Surrendering to an irresistible impulse, my friend picked up the phone, dialed his colleague, and watched him draw away from the lady to answer it.

'This is God speaking,' said a deep, commanding voice. 'I see what you are doing. It is a grievous sin.'

He hung up and saw the parties separating . . .

Now we faced the prospect of leaving these familiar ramshackle offices for a huge cement structure in the country, far away in Langley, Virginia, eight miles from the White House and the State Department. We did not like the idea at all and criticized our misguided Uncle Allen for moving us to a sort of academic campus far from the corridors of power."

*This article is classified CONFIDENTIAL.*